



‘How to become what you are’: Self-becoming and individuation in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and Hesse’s *Demian* and *Steppenwolf*

Journal of European Studies

2021, Vol. 51(1) 3–23

© The Author(s) 2021



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0047244120981166

journals.sagepub.com/home/jes



Thomas Crew

University of Cambridge

Abstract

In this essay I consider the theme of individuation or self-becoming in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* (1888) and Hesse’s *Demian* (1917) and *Steppenwolf* (1927). Although this task appears interdisciplinary, Nietzsche’s autobiography can be considered a *Bildungsroman* in which ‘Nietzsche’ plays the protagonist. After showing the correspondences between Nietzsche’s and Hesse’s diagnoses of contemporary Europe, which can be summed up with the notion of ‘decadence’ or nihilism, I suggest that they both point towards the process of self-becoming as the ultimate remedy for both the individual and society. Self-becoming is a painful yet necessary process that holds the repeated destruction of the individual’s identity as the precondition for attaining the status of human being. It is a process implied by Nietzsche’s ‘formula for human greatness’: *amor fati*. Resistance to individuation leads to a state of ‘miserable ease’, embodied by what Hesse calls the ‘bourgeois’ and what Nietzsche terms the ‘last men’.

Keywords

amor fati, decadence, Immortals, last man, madness, nihilism, Zarathustra

Introduction

‘In those weeks I had begun a course of reading that left a deeper impression on me than anything I had previously read. Even subsequently I rarely experienced books in such a way, perhaps just Nietzsche’ (Hesse, 2014: 88).¹ This quotation from *Demian*, uttered by Emil Sinclair as he remembers his period of isolation and reflection in the university town of H., is just one of seven instances in which Nietzsche is explicitly mentioned in

Corresponding author:

Thomas Crew, St Edmund’s College, University of Cambridge, CB3 0BN, UK.

Email: tc502@cam.ac.uk

Demian and *Steppenwolf*. Written 18 and 28 years after Nietzsche's death, the references to Nietzsche in these two texts all share this admiring quality: as Sinclair suggests, Nietzsche's impact on Hesse was such that his philosophy was not merely read but experienced, perhaps even internalized and embodied.

References to Nietzsche are a constant feature of Hesse's writing, appearing from *Peter Camenzind* in 1904 to *The Glass Bead Game* in 1946 (Szabó, 2007: 25–53). However, the period between *Demian* and *Steppenwolf* arguably represents the height of Hesse's admiration for his compatriot. Jirí Sirucek, for example, claims that *Demian* represents the strongest expression of Nietzsche's influence on Hesse's work (2010: 150), and David Horrocks describes *Steppenwolf* as 'highly derivative', due to its 'close parallels with Nietzsche in themes, imagery, and symbolic motifs' (1993: 144). Whilst Hesse read *Zarathustra* during his formative years in Tübingen,² his highly evocative use of the phrase 'ecce homo' (1977: 151) in the last chapter of *Klingsor* suggests that he had discovered that text, Nietzsche's last original work, by at least 1919.³

Given the experiences of his childhood and adolescence, it is perhaps little wonder that Hesse was so drawn to Nietzsche. They both came 'from a devout protestant home', as Hugo Ball (1947: 98) notes, and they both struggled, or simply refused, to acquiesce to and assimilate into the norms and conventions of their respective societies. True to this sense of defiance, Paul Bishop describes *Ecce Homo* as 'deliberately provocative' (2012: 341) – a work in whose closing pages Nietzsche writes, with a certain degree of ironic understatement: 'This is why I was in need of a word that has the sense of a challenge to everyone' (Nietzsche, 1988: 371). Such was the force of this challenge that *Ecce Homo* 'has been considered by far the "maddest" text in all philosophy', and 'as such', as Sarah Kofman and Duncan Large note, 'it has been rejected' (1994: 56). Hesse similarly challenged the spirit of his times, and also found himself duly marginalized. When, in 1914, he tried to temper the 'nationalist fervor that had been whipped up by the German government and media' in his article 'O Friends, Not These Tones!' 'he was attacked', as Ingo Cornils notes, 'by all quarters of the German press' (2009: 4). Perhaps for this reason Hesse eventually followed Nietzsche into effective exile in Switzerland.

These themes of isolation, rejection, rebellion and madness are of central importance to these three texts and, in particular, to the question of self-becoming. However, for all the sense of rejection and struggle in these works, they ultimately contain little sense of bitterness or resentment, as Hesse was keen to stress in his afterword to *Steppenwolf*, appended over 30 years after the novel's first publication. Both Hesse and Nietzsche were clearly keen to enter into dialogue with their age and their contemporaries. *Ecce Homo* was intended to prepare the way for Nietzsche's *Revaluation of All Values*, which, as Gerald Hödl notes, can be understood not 'merely as a literary project, but as a political act, as a material alteration of the world' (2009: 485). Similarly, in the same year as the publication of *Demian*, Hesse also published *Zarathustra's Return*, with the subtitle: 'A Word to Germany's Youth'. Not only does this show the extent to which Hesse saw in Nietzsche a much needed voice for his own age, but, as Cornils notes, it is also indicative of his attempts to directly engage 'his disillusioned readers' (2009: 4) in the wake of the First World War.⁴

Given the historical backdrop to these texts, the need for this dialogue could hardly be clearer. As Hesse wrote in his 1926 essay, 'The longing of our age for a worldview':

The completely transformed and remodelled image of the earth's surface, the enormous changes of but a few decades, borne out by every town and landscape in the world since the end of industrialization, corresponds to an equal shift in the souls and minds of men. The years since the outbreak of the World War have accelerated this development, so that we can today declare, without exaggeration, the death and dismantling of that civilization into which we older ones were once raised as children, and which, at the time, seemed eternal and indestructible. (Quoted in Cornils, 2009: 9)

Among the victims of this destruction, he continues, were 'the two pillars of all life, culture, and morality: religion and custom' (2009: 9). Each of these three texts expressly relates to this sense of unprecedented historical rupture. They attempt not only to come to terms with their age, but, more daringly, suggest how it might be overcome. As Emil Sinclair says of the circle assembled around Frau Eva towards the end of *Demian*: 'Our task was to represent an island in the world, an example perhaps, but at any rate to announce, through our actions, the possibility of a different way of living' (Hesse, 2014: 148). Sinclair's words stand as a programmatic statement on all three texts, in which the idea of presenting an example or a model human – as 'ecce homo' itself suggests – is of central significance. Although billed as an autobiography and written by a philosopher, *Ecce Homo* therefore shares the literary quality of Hesse's novels. At the heart of their efforts to reinterpret and overcome the cultural tradition is the 'ethical ideal' (Large, 2009: 17) of self-becoming, or what Hesse revealingly refers to as 'Menschwerdung'⁵ (Hesse, 1975: 72).

The first half of this article considers the way in which these texts assess their times. By the end of this section, the necessity for the question of self-becoming will have become clear. The second half of the article then takes up this question in detail: what does it mean to become a self and how does one do so? In the course of the essay a split will emerge between 'inspirational examples of achieved selfhood' (Large, 2009: xvii) and the rest – what the protagonist of *Steppenwolf* Harry Haller calls 'the bourgeois', whose ultimate expression Nietzsche terms the 'last men'. But this split should not be considered absolute: it serves rather as a point of contrast. For as these texts show, even those 'who have developed a level of self far beyond that which is possible for the bourgeois' (Hesse, 1975: 60) remain subject to regression. Likewise, there is no reason why the bourgeois cannot embark on a journey of individuation themselves. As Zarathustra says: 'To lure many away from the herd – that is why I have come' (Nietzsche, 2012: 15). Just as Nietzsche repeatedly refers back to *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*, so *Zarathustra* will also feature prominently in this article. As Hödl notes, 'In a certain way, Nietzsche will deploy himself . . . in his later works in the role that he had at this point still intended for the literary figure *Zarathustra* – that of the lawgiver for the coming millennia' (2009: 474).

'The sickness of the age': Diagnosing the times

The fact that by the 1880s Nietzsche already saw society in a state of 'decay' – anticipating the implications of the Industrial Revolution as well as the 'death' of what Hesse referred to as the two pillars of all civilization: religion and custom – and the fact that he appropriated this state of decay and change by announcing himself in *Ecce Homo* as 'the

first *immoralist*' (1988: 319), explains why Harry Haller remarks: 'A nature such as Nietzsche's had to endure the misery of today more than a generation in advance; what he had to go through alone and misunderstood, is being endured today by thousands' (Hesse, 1975: 28). This verdict is one that Nietzsche shares, writing in *Ecce Homo*: 'I am myself not yet timely – some are born posthumously' (1988: 298). This belief explains the choice of Nietzsche's earlier title 'Untimely meditations' and his repeated, somewhat eerie calls at the end of *Ecce Homo*: 'Have I been understood?' (1988: 371–4). As Kofman and Large note: it is Nietzsche's 'profound conviction that the problems which are his, and his position as an immoralist, are still too premature, too sudden to be understood' (1994: 53). Hence he writes in a letter of 1888: 'it is not inconceivable that I am the first philosopher of the age, perhaps even a little more, something . . . standing between two millennia' (Nietzsche, 1954: 1276).

By the time of *Demian* and *Steppenwolf*, it is not only the likes of Nietzsche 'who have fallen between two ages' (Hesse, 1975: 28), as Haller puts it, but rather, to varying degrees, the whole post-war generation. As Haller continues: 'For there are times when a whole generation falls in this way between two ages, between two modes of life, so that what was once self-evident and customary, what once provided a sense of security and innocence is lost' (Hesse, 1975: 28). As the Editor of Haller's story is keen to stress, people such as Nietzsche, Harry Haller, Max Demian and, eventually, Emil Sinclair – those who are aware of their state of cultural homelessness – potentially have a lot to teach us, because of the searching questions we ask in the midst of such confusion, when we find ourselves robbed of the comfort of tradition and unable to take anything for granted.

This notion of an epochal shift, of a 'collision of old and new values' (Swales, 2009: 171) – 'where two ages, two cultures and religions overlap' (Hesse, 1975: 27–8) giving rise to a near universal sense of instability, uncertainty and anxiety – provides the backdrop against which these three texts are set. It is their common starting point and fundamental presupposition. In the penultimate chapter of *Demian*, for example, we hear of Demian's assessment of society:

Everywhere, he said, the group and the herd reign, but nowhere freedom and love. All this apparent community – from the student fraternities and the singing clubs to the nation states – was forced; it was a community born of anxiety, fear, and awkwardness, and at its centre, he said, it was rotten and old and on the verge of collapse. (Hesse, 2014: 139)

This huddled community of anxiety – which for Hesse and Nietzsche represents the broad sweep of 'civilized' humanity – is based on a certain disquieting feeling. Demian continues: 'They all feel that their moral codes no longer apply, that they are following old law-tables; neither their religions nor their morality, nothing about them is suited to the needs of the present' (2014: 139). Demian's words are immediately reminiscent of Zarathustra's, in particular those of the chapter 'On old and new tables', in which Zarathustra asks: 'Oh my brothers, is not everything *now in flux*? Have not all railings and walkways failed and collapsed into the water? Who still *holds* to "good" and "evil"?' (Nietzsche, 2012: 154). It is not merely the moral structures of society that have lost their integrity in modernity, as Zarathustra here implies, but the very meaning of Western

culture and its sustaining myths. As Haller comments, recalling the contrived funeral proceedings he had witnessed earlier in the day:

Our world of culture was a cemetery. Here Christ and Socrates, Mozart and Haydn, Dante and Goethe, all of them existed merely as indecipherable names on rusting plaques, surrounded by awkward and insincere mourners – mourners who would have given an awful lot for their continued faith in these rusting relics. (Hesse, 1975: 86)

Similarly, the only reason that the professor, with whom Haller so disastrously jars is able to turn up at his job ‘year after year’ and somehow be ‘merry in the process’ is his ignorance:

for he believes in the value of his work; he believes in science and scholarship, whose servant he is; he believes in the value of sheer knowledge . . . for he believes in progress, in development. He didn’t experience the war, nor the rattling of the foundations of thought through Einstein (this, he thinks, only concerns mathematicians). (1975: 87–8)

For Haller, as for Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Sinclair and Demian, prevailing conceptions of religion, science, ‘progress’, culture and state, all these proud pillars of modern society – the ‘walkways’ and ‘railings’ which provide orientation and direction, something to ‘grasp’, to keep with Nietzsche’s pun – have collapsed and no longer offer any meaning or anything for them to believe in. In this way these five ‘characters’ may all be considered crazy: ‘They have fallen from all sense of security and innocence’ (Hesse, 1975: 28). It is therefore no coincidence that the Editor’s comments on those who have fallen between two ages – who ‘stand between two millennia’, to use Nietzsche’s formulation – is followed immediately by the section titled ‘Harry Haller’s papers’, which bears the subtitle: ‘For madmen only’.

Throughout *Steppenwolf*, *Demian* and *Ecce Homo*, the notion of madness is a cipher for change and transition. It initially implies the loss of faith and foundations and can be contrasted with the concepts of ‘Everyman’, ‘the herd’ or what Haller refers to as the bourgeois – a type of person that is defined instead by the desire for order, stability and comfort. The ‘Treatise on the Steppenwolf’ states: ‘Now, what we might call ‘the bourgeois’ . . . is nothing other than the attempt to strike an equilibrium, nothing other than the desire for a balanced centre between the innumerable extremes and dichotomies of human behaviour’ (Hesse, 1975: 58). The bourgeois are characterized by their ‘undiscerning contentment’ (Nietzsche, 2012: 146), which conveniently denies and represses any potential threat to the appearance of order. They are ‘too comfortable to think for themselves and to be their own judges’, as Demian says, hence they ‘assimilate themselves into the rules as they happen to find them’ (Hesse, 2014: 68). In contrast to the inner anguish of madmen like Haller, ‘they have it easy’ (2014: 68).

However, for all the distress and loneliness that necessarily accompanies those who find themselves stranded between two cultural eras and beyond the bounds of all convention – Nietzsche, for example, writes of the ‘irrefutable lack of *adequate company*’ (1988: 283) which has characterized his whole life, while Sinclair and Haller are both driven to the brink of suicide – the loss and collapse of the old world and its old values along with the madness this engenders is no cause for regret. For tradition has come to

work as a shackle on the development of the individual and society, preventing the exploration for alternative ways of being. As Demian puts it: 'the will of humanity is never and nowhere identifiable with that of contemporary society, nor with the nations, the various peoples, associations or churches' (2014: 140). For Nietzsche, the value and legitimacy of traditional institutions and beliefs has in fact always been suspect. Hence he writes in *Ecce Homo* of 'my attack on two millennia of perversity and human defilement' (1988: 313). Each of these three texts therefore takes aim at those institutions that are responsible for upholding, disseminating and interpreting the values of the dying era. They are each 'full of sovereign contempt', as Nietzsche puts it with characteristic pathos, 'for everything around them called "Reich", "education", "Christianity", "Bismarck", "success"' (1988: 317).

Haller's clash with the professor is a case in point. In the first instance, it is triggered by the 'vain and self-important depiction of the aged Goethe' (Hesse, 1975: 89), which Haller finds framed in the professor's house. As David Kenosian notes, 'the cultural tradition with which Haller identifies has sunk to the depths of triviality' (1995: 58): it has become ossified and reified, and as such it no longer offers anything from which individuals might learn. Instead of conveying any of the issues of life at the centre of Goethe's work, the picture is merely an object, 'fit to adorn any bourgeois home' (Hesse, 1975: 88). As Russell Berman notes: 'In Hesse's account the reification of established culture encompasses both a monumentalization of the literary legacy and . . . a mechanization of life forms. Cultural material loses its vitality, just as middle-class normalcy grows increasingly rigid' (1986: 189). As Berman suggests, such stilted and reified culture goes hand in hand with a stilted and reified society: ossified human relations with no genuine, original signs of life – hence the use of the non-discriminate terms 'rabble', 'Everyman' and 'herd', which pervade these three texts. Human beings appear everywhere homogenous, exchangeable and cut off from the 'original creative forces of life' (1986: 190).

It is also fitting that such a picture should be found in the house of a professor, as a representative of the equally stilted and detached academic tradition. As Nietzsche says of his own time as a professor: 'With pity I saw myself starved and hollowed out: *realities* were missing entirely from within my knowledge . . . I was gripped by a most burning thirst' (1988: 325). Although academia deals with some of the most pressing human questions, it leaves him empty and offers no form of sustenance, for it has become so far removed from its original object of investigation. As Zarathustra says in his chapter on scholars: 'Grasp them with your hands, and they puff like sacks of flour, and without wanting to; but who could guess that their dust derives from corn and the golden joy of summer fields?' (Nietzsche, 2012: 96). In both Nietzsche and Hesse, the world of learning and academia is depicted as concerned with life, but seemingly only in the abstract. In *Steppenwolf* it takes a prostitute – as someone much closer to the 'original creative forces of life' – to remind 'Herr Professor' (Hesse, 1975: 99) Haller what life is. As Hermine says: 'You're actually rather bright, aren't you? But in such a dim way – just like a professor. Come, have another roll!' (1975: 99). By instructing him to eat, Hermine attempts to bring Haller back to a more immediate relationship to life.

Beyond the connection to life, the scholar also loses the connection to himself. Having spent so much time reading, absorbed in the thoughts of others, 'The scholar . . .

ultimately loses altogether the capacity to think of his own accord' (1988: 392–3), as Nietzsche writes. 'The scholar – a decadent. I've seen it with my own eyes: talented, abundant and open souls . . . "read to disgrace", no more than matches which must be struck to produce sparks – "thoughts"' (1988: 293). The very people responsible for cultural interpretation and dissemination are hopelessly passive and unoriginal – hardly fit to keep the cultural tradition relevant and alive. Hence Nietzsche stresses in *Ecce Homo*: 'I distinguish my concept of "philosopher" as far as possible from a concept that includes even a Kant, not to mention the academic "ruminants" and other professors of philosophy' (1988: 320). The reference to Kant demonstrates that a return to the past can hardly promise redemption: the problem of decadence strikes at the heart of our intellectual inheritance.

This assessment of academia is found again in Haller's take on the state of contemporary journalism:

I spent a good ten minutes reading an article in some newspaper, allowing the mind of an irresponsible human to enter into me through my eye – a human who chews and minces the words of others, but brings them back up undigested. (Hesse, 1975: 39)

The journalist, like the academic, has lost capacity for, or perhaps interest in, independent thought. Both 'gawp at the ideas that others have thought' (Nietzsche, 2012: 96), as Zarathustra says. Just as culture has been reduced to a mere object, so Haller disparagingly refers to 'the mash of words that was the newspaper article' (1975: 40). Journalism has lost its meaning and relevance to such an extent that its product has become a mere assortment of words to be gobbled down in the same manner as his food: 'a sizeable helping of some slaughtered calf's liver' (1975: 39). Hesse's brutal image of the dead calf implies, in a similar way to Nietzsche's image of the dusty bag of flour (once the golden joy of summer fields), that these institutions work against life.

A population led by such institutions becomes hopelessly out of touch with itself, mindlessly passing on the thoughts, ideas and judgements of others, and lacking the kind of guidance that stimulates and challenges and therefore strives for transcendence. The social fabric is maintained through blind habit and fear. Hence Zarathustra says: 'For the children I am still a scholar, but no longer for the sheep' (Nietzsche, 2012: 95). It is therefore no coincidence that *Demian* and, from a certain perspective, also *Steppenwolf* end in war – for a mechanical, conformist population is easy to lead. Indeed, Haller is at pains to point out the 'next mass slaughter', which, he says, 'will no doubt be even more abominable than this one was' (Hesse, 1975: 129). A society so divorced from life may even look forward to war, as a promise of something real. As *Demian* says: 'People will be overjoyed. They're already looking forward to the first onslaught – so stale has life become for them' (Hesse, 2014: 162). For Nietzsche, however, the institution chiefly responsible for leading people away from reality, from themselves, and issuing standardized and narrow codes of behaviour – responsible, in other words, for fostering a 'decadent' society – is religion.

As Nietzsche writes, 'Blindness in the face of Christianity' – the fact that its true nature has not already been grasped – 'is the *crime* par excellence – the crime *against life*' (1988: 371). For Nietzsche Christianity is predicated on a series of fundamental

denials: of reality, the truth and the self. It therefore represents a kind of nihilism. This denial comes about essentially through two central tenets of Christian morality. Firstly, through the concepts of heaven and hell – the notion of a ‘beyond’. Such notions constitute what Brian Domino terms ‘toxic ideals’ (2012: 294), for they distract us from the real world around us and give rise to ‘the temptation to dwell on alternatives’ (Han-Pile, 2009: 239) – the fantasy of redemption after life. The result is that reality ‘*as it is*’ (Nietzsche, 1988: 370) is never faced, hence Nietzsche regards such ideals as ‘cowardice and *flight* from reality’ (1988: 312). As Nietzsche writes: ‘The term ‘beyond’, ‘true world’, made up to denigrate the *only* world there is – so as to leave no aim, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!’ (1988: 374). The denial inherent in this belief is such that life, robbed of an immediate meaning, becomes a form of death. In the ‘Treatise on the Steppenwolf’, for example, Haller and his kind are described as ‘suicidal, for they see redemption in death and not in life’ (Hesse, 1975: 55).

Secondly, the denial inherent in religion comes about through the imperative to love thy neighbour: the concept of ‘Nächstenliebe’, or brotherly love. Far from a generous or gracious attitude, brotherly love leads to a chronic preoccupation with others that distracts us from our own issues and needs. Hence ‘Nächstenliebe’ in Nietzsche becomes ‘Nächstensucht’ (1988: 372) – love has become a form of dependency.⁷ As Zarathustra says: ‘You must learn to love yourself . . . with a wholesome and healthy love: so that you might tolerate yourself and not roam aimlessly about. / Such roaming about proudly dubs itself “brotherly love”’ (2012: 148). Max Demian is similarly critical of such aimless wondering: ‘Straying from yourself is sin. You must be able to retreat fully within yourself, like a turtle’ (2014: 69). But this is precisely what Christian morality prevents. Like academia and the contemporary media, religion not only obscures the individual’s connection to life, but also their relationship with themselves. The noise and frantic nature of modern urban life is therefore symptomatic of individuals who are unable to endure their own company. Christianity thus represents for Nietzsche an inverted morality: what ‘horrifies’ him most is that ‘one sees . . . in the typical signs of decline, in that which defies the instinct, in “selflessness” . . . in “depersonalization” and in “brotherly love” (brotherly *dependency*!) *higher* value: what am I saying! *value in itself*!’ (1988: 372). ‘The sole morality that has been taught till now’, he continues, ‘the morality of unselfing oneself, betrays a will to the end; at the most fundamental level it *denies* life’ (1988: 372).

This denial of life, or nihilism, represents the fundamental diagnosis of the texts. It forms the dominant counterpoint to Zarathustra’s imperative to ‘become what you are!’ (2012: 183), which is predicated, as we shall see, on precisely the opposite attitude. Christianity, like all those institutions and traditions intended to guide or “‘improve” humanity’, as Nietzsche writes, have in fact become ‘the trick of *sucking out* life itself, of making it anaemic’ (1988: 373). They therefore represent a kind of ‘*vampirism*’ (1988: 373) – leaving only the shells of humans in its wake.

Given this bleak and rather scathing appraisal of contemporary society, the collapse and destruction of the old world and its old values, as well as the despair that this can bring, is to be welcomed: it is the condition for change and renewal. This explains the litany of destructive motifs in these texts, not least in *Ecce Homo*, in which Nietzsche

declares: 'I am not a man, I am dynamite' (1988: 365). This also explains the subtitle to *Twilight of the Idols*, another work of 1888: 'How to philosophize with a hammer', and the image of Zarathustra as a sculptor, remorselessly revealing his image of man from the 'hardest, ugliest stone' (2012: 65). The idea is to affirm and reappropriate this age of cultural decay in order to make room for new growth.

Nevertheless, with Nietzsche's concept of *Entselbstungsmoral* (the morality of unselfing oneself), the notion of self-becoming comes more clearly into focus. As Large comments: 'In a text so determinedly devoted to a presentation of techniques for becoming a self, it is hardly surprising if the aspect of Christianity to which Nietzsche objects most vehemently is its 'morality of unselfing oneself'' (Large, 2009: xxv). Given the desperate depictions of a society under the sway of this morality or attitude – from the contrived nature of mass society to the self-conscious madness of those like Haller and Sinclair who have long since lost their faith in the integrity of civilization – the question of self-becoming and individuation also takes on a certain urgency. Defunct institutions and ossified cultural myths have given rise to equally defunct and ossified people: human beings who can only in the most banal sense be referred to as such.

Self-becoming: 'a future philosophy'

The common starting point in their considerations of self-becoming – what Hesse refers to in German as 'Menschwerdung' (1975: 71) and 'individuation' (1975: 54), borrowing from the language and thought of C. G. Jung⁸ – is that being human is not a given. Personhood is something to be attained. As Pistorius says to Sinclair: 'Surely you don't take all the bipeds out there pacing the streets as human, simply because they walk upright and bear their young for nine months?' (Hesse, 2014: 110). While this notion that being human is not merely a condition of birth represents a universal feature of humankind in Nietzsche and Hesse, in societies under the guiding influence of *Entselbstungsmoral* this feature is thoroughly obscured and, at the same time, amplified. Hence Sinclair says: 'But what that is exactly, a truly living person, that's more of a mystery today than ever before' (2014: 9). Consequently, as Zarathustra suggests, human beings are nowhere to be found: 'I walk amongst men as though amongst the fragments and limbs of men! . . . And should my eye turn from the present to the past', he continues, illustrating how long-established this 'morality' is, 'it always finds the same: fragments and limbs and cruel coincidences – but no men!' (Nietzsche, 2012: 107). He sees everywhere passive and aimless throngs of people who move 'everywhere in hordes' (Hesse, 1975: 38) through the city, who 'walk the streets in their millions, resembling little else but sand on the shore or the spray of breaking waves' (1975: 72) – people labelled 'good-natured herd animals' (Nietzsche, 1988: 369) in *Ecce Homo* or 'the many-too-many' (2012: 33) in *Zarathustra*.

In such circumstances, the question of self-becoming gains a particular force and relevance. For there is nothing necessary about this vacuous and 'harmless' state of contemporary man. As Pistorius says: 'You see, the potential to become human exists in each of them. But it is only when he senses this potential, only when he learns to make it at least partly conscious, that it truly belongs to him' (Hesse, 2014: 110). This potential is precisely what interests Nietzsche, who turns once more to Zarathustra:

it is all my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and cruel coincidence. / And how could I bear to be a man, if man were not also poet and reader of riddles and redeemer of coincidence! (2012: 107)

There is no need for man to remain arbitrarily determined by the social tides, lying washed up as a mere 'coincidence' and lacking all freedom and necessity. Zarathustra's whole endeavour, he tells us in 'The honey offering', is to tempt man, to bait him, to fish him out of the bottomless depths of the 'human sea' and pull him up to his mountain heights – a process he encapsulates with the formula: 'become what you are!' (2012: 183). These works therefore serve not only to illustrate or diagnose the state of contemporary society, but to press the fact that there are others ways to be, and suggest how they might be attained. Destruction alone is therefore not enough: the space it creates must be filled in a deliberate way. As Zarathustra says, perhaps addressing Hesse's 'madmen': 'Free from what? What does Zarathustra care about that? Brightly, however, your eye should tell me: free *for what?*' (2012: 47).

The first way in which Hesse and Nietzsche attempt to counter the decadence of contemporary society – the detachment from life and self that is its defining feature – is by reprioritizing and repeatedly emphasizing 'the only real world' – the world of our lived, daily experience. In the foreword to *Ecce Homo*, for example, Nietzsche comments: 'Philosophy, as I have understood and lived it until now' (1988: 258). Elsewhere in *Ecce Homo* we find: 'From my will to health, to *life*, I made my philosophy' (1988: 267), and he admires Zarathustra because 'He does not just talk differently, he *is* also differently' (1988: 260). All the while the emphasis is on life and the manner in which we exist. 'In other words', as Bishop notes, 'knowledge itself is subordinated to the goal of life' – hence Nietzsche's renown 'as one of the foremost exponents of *Lebensphilosophie*, or vitalism' (2012: 5). This explains Nietzsche's comment in *The Gay Science*: 'the *force* of knowledge lies not in its degree of truth, but in its age, in the extent to which it has been embodied; it lies in its character as a precondition of life' (quoted in Bishop, 2012: 379). Hence Sinclair's comment (at the top of the article) that he had not merely read but 'experienced' Nietzsche is entirely fitting.

The primacy of experience in these texts is in fact absolute. When Sinclair is confronted by the suicidal Knauer, for example, he is unable to pass on advice that he has merely heard – even if it means denying Knauer much needed consolation:

I remembered what Pistorius had said to me. But regardless how true his words seemed, I couldn't pass them on; I couldn't give advice that didn't stem from my own experience and that I still wasn't capable of following myself. (2014: 120)

As Beatrice Han-Pile notes, this reflects Nietzsche's 'conviction that philosophy is a way of life rather than a theory about life: it has to be lived through to be genuinely understood' (2009: 234). Knowledge that remains abstract – that is not exemplified by one's own way of being – is specious and ultimately useless. As Demian comments: 'Thinking is only of value if it is lived' (Hesse, 2014: 67). The implicit imperative is that the life of the mind and that of the body must be entwined. The suicidal life of Harry Haller, by his own admission a man 'overfed' (1975: 116) on knowledge, demonstrates that this

imperative is not merely provocative or contrarian, but intensely necessary. As Haller tells us, with a pained self-awareness: 'I mean, those who like to think, who make thinking their main concern in life, they might well excel in it, but they've nonetheless swapped the ground for water, and sooner or later they'll drown' (1975: 21).

The second means by which these texts challenge the decadence of society is by demonstrating the necessity of honest self-reflection and an unflinching reckoning with the state of our inner lives. As Haller himself says, referring to his anti-war newspaper articles:

I've expressed the opinion a couple of times that all peoples and indeed all individuals should search their own souls instead of lulling themselves to sleep with false questions of 'political accountability'. To what extent did their own mistakes, failings and bad habits account for the war and the rest of the world's misery? This, I suggested, is only way that we might avoid the next war. (Hesse, 1975: 128–9)

Finding fault with society is at best only half the story. The way out of decadence and nihilism, as well as the explosive historical juncture, leads via the individual – via his quest to become a human being.

Just as Hesse's and Nietzsche's emphasis on the world of experience is an attempt to counter the contemporary tendency to flee in the face of reality, so this turn towards the self, what Solbach terms the 'Nietzschean turn' (2009: 94), is an attempt to counter the individual's tendency to flee from herself, from her own inner life. This also explains why Nietzsche considers himself the world's first psychologist: 'Of all the philosophers before me, who was a *psychologist*'? (1988: 371). If 'the will of humanity' is not to be found in the myths and institutions of contemporary society, as Demian says, it is to be found in the individual: 'that which nature intends for man is printed in the individual, in you and me. It was there in Jesus; it was there in Nietzsche' (Hesse, 2014: 140). Beyond their mutual sense of heresy, Jesus, Nietzsche and Hesse might be considered united by their concern for the inner life of man. Coming to terms with the inner world is essential if individuals are to heed the call of self-becoming. For our purposes, it also makes clear what exactly is at stake in this process.

As Haller's comment suggests, this 'turn', if heeded, brings about the awareness of the connection between the nature of individuals and that of society. As Pistorius comments: 'Whether we will ever rejuvenate the world, you and me and a handful of others, time will tell. But within each of us the world must be renewed every day, otherwise we are lost' (Hesse, 2014: 116). Self-examination, Pistorius suggests, reveals that many of the troubles and problems that afflict the age are mirrored in the individual. The most prominent of these mirror issues are those of rupture, change, destruction and transition. On the one hand, these issues are presented as the salient feature of the times; on the other, they are consistently presented as the defining feature of the human condition as such. This point is most succinctly and poetically expressed by Zarathustra:

Man is a cable suspended between animal and *Übermensch* – a cable over an abyss. / A perilous going-across, a perilous on-the-way, a perilous looking-back, a perilous shuddering and pausing. / What is great about man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved about man is that he is a *transition* [*Übergang*] and a *decline* [*Untergang*]. (Nietzsche, 2012: 9)

Following Zarathustra, the 'Treatise on the Steppenwolf' states:

For man is not a fixed and lasting creation . . . he is rather an attempt and a transition,⁹ he is nothing other than the narrow, perilous bridge between nature and spirit . . . between these two poles his life fluctuates anxiously and tremulous. (Hesse, 1975: 69)

This conception of man is also found in *Demian*. Drawing a distinction between the broad, decadent mass of society and the 'awakened ones' associated with Frau Eva, Sinclair comments: 'For them humanity was . . . something complete that had to be maintained and protected. For us, humanity was a remote future – a future that we were all heading for, whose image no one knew, whose laws were nowhere written' (Hesse, 2014: 148).

These passages, which form the crux of these texts, are laden with implications for the idea of self-becoming. Initially, they underscore the notion that human being is something to be attained. But beyond this, they suggest that the process of becoming is without end. As Large notes: a self 'is not something you just are – you have to achieve it, and keep achieving it over and over again' (2009: xvii). This suggests the non-linear nature of self-becoming and our susceptibility to deviation, distraction and regression – a susceptibility that is only heightened in an age of decadence. Our inclination towards deviation is particularly characteristic of Sinclair's story of individuation, which comprises various brave steps forward and a number of regressions. The chapter name 'Jacob's struggle' is in this respect particularly informative, since the name Jacob – owing to the limp of the biblical character and the similarity of 'Jacob' to the biblical river Jabbok – can be taken to mean 'the one who walks crookedly' (Jeffrey, 1992: 852).

Perhaps the central implication of these passages, however, is that there is something deeply unsettling about the process of individuation. As the image of the cable strung above an abyss or the repetition of the word 'perilous' suggest, the process of individuation is unstable, unknown and inherently risky. A 'true' or 'immortal' human being, as the Treatise puts it, is therefore not just something to be attained, but dared or waged. Like the shifting nature of the times, self-becoming raises questions of security, orientation and identity, while also implying destruction. As Frau Eva says of the visions that provide Sinclair with comfort and guidance: 'there is no ever-lasting dream; new ones always replace old ones, and each must be voluntarily relinquished' (Hesse, 2014: 146). Indeed, that which is lost in the process of individuation, that which one is repeatedly forced to cast off and abandon, is often of great value, or a source of particular attachment. Haller rues the fact that: 'Amidst each of these deeply unsettling experiences my respective identity had shattered into bits . . . Each time a carefully nurtured and particularly loved piece of my life had abandoned me and gone missing' (Hesse, 1975: 75). In a similar vein, Sinclair comments: 'But it was always this way – just as I had grown attached to a certain state, just as a dream was beginning to do me good, it was already wilting and going blind' (Hesse, 2014: 100).

Just as Haller's story relates not only the destruction of external circumstances (such as the loss of his family or financial wealth), but the destruction of his ego and identity, so Sinclair is here referring to the loss and death of an inner state of being. The implication is that we become almost entirely new people as a result of such periods of change.

Chaos is therefore not just a feature of the external world, but a fundamental part of the composition of man. As the Treatise states: 'In reality, however, no ego, not even the most naïve, is a unity, but rather a highly multifarious world: a night sky of stars, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, legacies and possibilities' (Hesse, 1975: 66). This idea is given dramatic embodiment by the giant mirror in the Magic Theatre in which Haller sees a thousand different versions of himself – as he was, is, and could potentially become.

In this way, 'madmen' are not only those who no longer identify with or find solace in the stories, institutions and conventions of society, but those who have acknowledged, if not yet accepted, the wealth of existential possibilities that exist within themselves and the fluid nature of their identities. In both cases, madmen have recognized the transient nature of all order. Moreover, as the raucous nature of the scene before the giant mirror suggests, madmen have understood, as Freud famously put it, 'that *the ego is not master in its own house*' (2001: 142, italics in original): the chaos of the inner world can never be finally brought under conscious control, and must be reckoned with as a reality unto itself. The flight from reality that characterizes the modern world therefore always implies a flight from inner as well as outer life, each of which is as real, intransigent and demanding as the other. Given the attempts of the Magic Theatre and the Treatise to expose this inner nature of man, they are both presented with the subtitle: 'For madmen only'.

If man is a bridge or a path – as Mozart, Goethe or the jazz musician Pablo might say – then we must constantly undergo transition and transformation. This is why, on Haller's first encounter with these 'Immortals', Goethe is said to undergo a series of strange metamorphoses: 'Goethe's face was now rosy and young and laughed; it resembled first Mozart then Schubert', before becoming 'quite old again, ancient, a thousand years old with hair like snow' (Hesse, 1975: 107–9). The process of self-becoming forces us to confront our transient and turbulent inner nature and to repeatedly shed – one way or another – our withered, if treasured identities. It is therefore a process that threatens to periodically overhaul and undermine our understanding of ourselves and the world, posing an enduring challenge to all sense of attachment, comfort and control.

In a manner reminiscent of society as a whole, individuals are therefore highly resistant to such periods of change. We possess a natural hostility towards self-becoming. For this reason individuation in Hesse and Nietzsche advances via periods of crisis – moments which force one to reconsider the trajectory of one's life and the assumptions one holds about the world. This is the very principle around which Sinclair has organized his story: 'I am only interested in the steps that I have taken in my life in order to reach myself' (Hesse, 2014: 52). It therefore follows that he relays 'only that which I experienced for the first time, that which drove me forwards and tore me loose' (2014: 52), since voluntarily surrendering to this process proves so difficult. This reluctant, crooked approach is also indicative of *Ecce Homo*, in which Nietzsche also recounts the various roles and identities he has donned and doffed in the course of his life – often belatedly and under duress: 'A long, all-too-long succession of years mean in my case . . . lapsing, relapsing, periodically a kind of *décadence*' (1988: 265). It takes illness, for example, to finally release him from his decadent professorship in Basel: 'This, indeed, is how that long period of illness appears to me *now*: it was as if I discovered life anew, myself included' (1988: 266–7).

This aversion to self-becoming is most clearly evinced in *Steppenwolf*. Although, on the one hand, Haller longs for a new life, to witness and take part in the ‘many morning skies that have yet to dawn’ (Nietzsche, 1988: 330), to invoke another of Nietzsche’s subtitles, he thoroughly resists the disorientation and loss that necessarily accompanies the process of self-renewal and individuation:

No, I’m telling you, there wasn’t a power in the world that could demand from me another harrowing self-encounter, another re-moulding, a new incarnation – a process, I might add, whose aim and end were not peace or rest, but on each and every occasion the annihilation and recreation of the self! (Hesse, 1975: 77)

As the Immortals warn in the Treatise, however: ‘Although, compared to the bourgeois, he is more aware of the necessity of individuation, he still shuts his eyes and would rather not know that by despairingly clinging to an identity and by desperately shunning decay, we secure the most certain route to eternal death’ (1975: 70) – the eternal death that is the life of the last men and society at large.

In this way, the process of individuation is marked by a certain anxious ambivalence as the analogy of the bridge and our hesitant crossing, or Sinclair’s painting of the sparrow hawk – half within and half without its shell – suggests. As Zarathustra says: ‘Not the height: the drop is what terrifies us! / The drop – where the eye plunges *down* and the hand reaches *up*. There the heart becomes dizzy over its conflicting will’ (Nietzsche, 2012: 110). Any desire for growth must always contend with a fiercely opposing tendency. As the Treatise states: ‘His innermost destiny drives him on towards the spirit, to God – his deepest longing draws him towards nature, back to the mother’ (Hesse, 1975: 69). In this way, individuals are essentially presented as caught between the ‘two worlds’ of *Demian*’s first chapter: on the one hand, what Solbach terms ‘our world’ – the world of ‘protection, safety and an all-embracing sense of security’, the world in which ‘all things have a definite meaning and purpose’ and which therefore bestows familiarity and comfort (2009: 85). This world is characterized by a sense of ‘warmth and security’ (Hesse, 2014: 24) and in its untroubled security and familiar order it represents a form of paradise. On the other hand, they are presented with ‘the other world’ – ‘the world of the alien, the other, which cannot be judged with certainty’, a world characterized by a ‘striking ambiguity’ and a sense of danger (Solbach, 2009: 85). In contrast to the warmth provided by the herd, this is the world of ‘loneliness and deadly cold’ (Hesse, 2014: 53), as Sinclair says – the world of chaos.

In moments when our inner, transient nature reveals itself and makes demands of us, the lure of ‘our world’, in Hesse’s novels, often proves stronger than the impulse to take a risk and to discover life anew – to undergo ‘a new incarnation’ (Hesse, 1975: 75). When Sinclair finds himself thrust out of the world of familiarity and security through his encounter with Kromer, for example, initially enjoying the excitement of freedom and independence, he seeks to reimmerge himself in the world of his parents at the first possible opportunity:

with all my damaged soul could muster, I fled from the awful slavery under Kromer back to the place where I had once been happy and at peace: to the lost paradise . . . to the serene world of

mother and father, to my sisters, to the scent of purity, to the God-approving state of Abel. (2014: 48)

It is precisely this smell of purity, the faint reminder of the world of childhood and a feeling of stability and order – ‘Oh, it smells good here’ (Hesse, 1975: 8) – that explains why Haller finds himself repeatedly living among those people he otherwise scorns. For the ‘warmth of the herd’ (Hesse, 2014: 137) provides ‘a moderate and gentle zone devoid of buffeting winds and storms’ (Hesse, 1975: 59), insulating him, and all who dwell there, from ‘that highest demand, issued by the spirit, to embrace and strive for genuine individuation, to walk the single and narrow path to immortality’ (Hesse, 1975: 70), as the Treatise tells us. His longing to fit in and find once more the approval of society, as the reference to Abel suggests, is merely ‘another attempt’, Demian says, ‘to take refuge in the crowd’ (2014: 145). It is the attempt to relieve his existential anxiety, to cling to a faded dream.

However, as Demian continues, ‘he won’t succeed’ (2014: 145). As the Treatise again warns: ‘No, the attempt to ‘return to nature’ always leads man down a painful and hopeless path’ (1975: 71). Just as Sinclair cannot return to that which he has left, so Haller ‘can never quite become wolf again’ (1975: 71). As the Immortals continue:

At the origin of all things is not innocence and simplicity. Everything which is created, even that which appears most simple, is already guilty, already divided – it has been thrown into the dirty river of becoming and is forever unable to swim back upstream. (1975: 71)

Indeed, attempts to smother the need to explore the ‘other world’ – out of a longing to return to apparently serene, or at least comfortable, states of the past – are bound to result in various forms of pain. Haller’s gout and physical rigidity, for example, is an external manifestation of his resistance to the process of self-becoming, to the ‘advancing destruction of what I used to call my personality’ (1975: 142). With the futility of this denial and resistance in mind, the Immortals point the way forward: ‘The path to innocence, the path out of creation, to God leads not back but forwards, not to wolf or child but ever further into guilt, ever deeper into the process of individuation’ (1975: 71).

The increasingly pronounced implication of the Treatise – for Theodore Ziolkowski the real centre of Hesse’s novel (1965: 227) – is that individuation is a necessity. The option of a ‘return’, or even of stasis, is not given to us. We find ourselves always already in the ‘dirty river of becoming’ – we have been ‘thrown’,¹⁰ to use another philosophical metaphor of the 1920s – and have no other option but to head downstream – to cross the bridge or walk the tightrope, in spite of our reservations, our reluctance, and our better ideas. As Mozart says: ‘life is always terrible. We can’t do anything about it and yet we are responsible. As soon as we are born we are guilty’ (Hesse, 1975: 225). We are responsible for a situation over which we have no ultimate control. As with Haller’s ‘execution’ in the Magic Theatre, we are condemned to live. And yet it is the willing acceptance of this paradox, Nietzsche and Hesse imply, that provides the path to freedom – to a life that is necessary and that honours the unique nature of our individual being. The alternative can only ever be a life of merely apparent safety and control – a life levelled down to blunt collective standards and shorn of all intensity, necessity, and vitality: a life, in other words, of ‘miserable ease’ (Nietzsche, 2012: 8).

The necessity of embracing the process of self-becoming is in fact incorporated into the very fabric of these texts, which are imbued with references to death, loss, and rebirth. In *Demian*, for example, the motif of the egg and the bird is of key significance. While it is most apparent with Sinclair's painting of the sparrow hawk, it is present from the 'eggshells' (2014: 10) of the opening pages to the vision of the heavenly bird before its climax. In this way it provides the implicit frame to the entire novel. Moreover, in Nietzsche, Bishop notes that the word 'Ecce' is evocative of the 'commemorative service' (2012: 362) of the same name held annually at Nietzsche's school in memory of those who had died, while Kofman and Large comment that *Ecce Homo* 'is a work of mourning' (1994: 58) in which 'Nietzsche buries his past, and is reborn again' (Bishop, 2012: 362). It is not so much an autobiography as a 'thanatography' (Kofman and Large, 1994: 58).

More generally, death is frequently implied throughout these works by an autumnal atmosphere and the image of falling golden leaves: death as '*apoptosis*', as Bishop notes (2012: 379). In one particular passage in *Demian*, whose sensual language is immediately reminiscent of Nietzsche, we read:

And so one evening I went walking through the outskirts of the town in the damp, foggy twilight . . . The path lay thick with fallen leaves, which, in some dark delight, I was turning over with my feet. It smelt damp and bitter; the distant trees emerged in foreboding and shadowy form from the mist . . . I stared into the black foliage and greedily inhaled the scent of rot and decay, which something in me responded to and welcomed. (Hesse, 2014: 74)

For Heribert Kuhn (2014: 207), this passage is written in the spirit of Nietzsche's poem, 'Autumn' – a poem specifically referenced by Harry Haller (Hesse, 1975: 77) and therefore connecting all three texts. As Nietzsche's poem puts it: 'Now you stand pale, / Cursed to winter wanderings, / Just like the smoke, / That always seeks colder skies' (quoted by Kuhn, 2014: 207). As well as being entirely natural phenomena, the smoke, twilight, fog and autumn are also inherently transient and somewhat ambiguous; they are intermediaries between two states which lack clear definition. In this way, they stand as emblems of the individuation process. The sense of cold associated with the smoke and autumn is indicative of the separation and radical isolation that this process presupposes, even if it holds out the tentative promise of truer, more intense social relationships.

By evoking change and transition through such natural phenomena these passages ask us to accept and affirm that the 'process of separation and fracturing are endemic to' – and a condition of – 'human life' (Swales, 2009: 176–7). They ask us to realize 'that the most valuable things can only come to us if we open ourselves up to the possibility of being hurt' (Han-Pile, 2009: 237) – that is, if we can tolerate our vulnerability and temper our need for control. In their natural beauty these passages associate this process with a certain nobility, dignity and, indeed, divinity. As the Immortals write: 'by embracing death and decay, by shedding layers and skins, by forever abandoning the ego to the process of change and transformation, we pave the way to immortality' (Hesse, 1975: 70).

Conclusion: 'In media vita'¹¹

The fact that the Immortals, *Demian*, 'Nietzsche' and Zarathustra – those characters who, in various ways, all act as guides, prophets and role models – are associated with the icy

air of madness and manifest or relate their capacity to continually morph and re-form themselves demonstrates that each of these texts represents a call to embrace and affirm the transition (*Übergang*) and decline (*Untergang*) that is inherent in the process of self-becoming, and to resist the temptation to stifle and choke a process which is presented as the condition for a free and ultimately human life. As Nietzsche writes, bringing this idea to its logical, if seemingly impossible conclusion: 'Not merely to endure what is necessary . . . but to *love* it' (1988: 297, italics in original).

While Large writes of 'the strenuous ethic of self-overcoming' (2009: xvii) – and for all *Steppenwolf* and *Demian* are filled with scenes of struggle and exasperation – self-becoming is a process that does not require effort, as the references to the falling autumnal leaves and the Immortal's call for 'abandonment' suggest. As Nietzsche says – who after all presents himself 'as an exemplary human being' (Large, 2009: xix): 'I cannot remember a single occasion on which I might have exerted myself – there is no hint of *wrestling* in my life . . . To "want" something, to "strive" for something, having a "purpose", a "desire" in mind – I know nothing of this from experience' (1988: 294–5).

The fact that becoming human is not a matter of effort also explains Nietzsche's comment on the second page of *Ecce Homo*: 'The last thing I would promise would be to "improve" humanity' (1988: 258). The effort to 'improve' mankind amounts to a resisting of this natural process, the attempt to control the diverse, varied, somewhat unpredictable and challenging human incarnations that would be the result of our heeding the call of self-becoming. The notion of 'improving' – that is, controlling – humanity is the very attitude that has led to such widespread lifelessness and misery, as people attempt to conform to narrowly prescribed social roles and values and deny their deeper, unsettling, yet liberating existential stirrings.

If it is not effort or graft that is required for self-becoming – virtues that all too easily slip off the tongue in today's world – then, these texts suggest, it is courage: courage to leap 'into the dirty river of becoming', and to embrace the death, destruction and madness this entails, without knowing where it might lead. As Nietzsche writes: 'To become what you are, you must not have the faintest clue *what* you are' (1988: 293). As well as courage, Nietzsche and Hesse therefore also call for faith. As Nietzsche writes, on the basis of his own experience:

Meanwhile, in the depths, the organizing 'idea' with a calling to be master grows and grows – it begins to command, it slowly leads you *back* out of byways and detours, it prepares *individual* qualities and skills which will one day prove indispensable as means to the whole – it trains one by one all the *ancillary* capacities before it breathes a word about the dominant task, about 'aim', 'purpose', 'meaning'. (1988: 294)

In his own case, Nietzsche writes, the 'higher concern' of this inner idea or 'instinct' – its 'secret labour' – 'was so pronounced that I never even suspected what was growing within me' (1988: 294). As Jung notes, the 'particularity' that the individual comes to embody in the process of individuation is 'not a particularity that is *sought out*, but one that is already ingrained in the psychic constitution' (1976: 449). In these passages, Nietzsche and Jung allude to the hidden necessity that resides in all people – a necessity that is suggested by the Magic Theatre's giant mirror and intimated by Sinclair: 'All I wanted was to give life and expression to that which, of its own accord, wanted to get out

of me' (Hesse, 2014: 100). The fact that Hesse also uses this line as the epigraph to *Demian* suggests the centrality of this idea to the conception of individuation and the challenge he and Nietzsche pose to a culture in thrall to the powers of the conscious, rational mind.¹²

For Nietzsche, the fact that we cannot determine or even know the destination of self-becoming is just as well, for the image of our fully individuated selves could only ever serve as an intimidating deterrent: 'For if you assume that your task, your destiny, the *fate* of your task lies considerably beyond the average measure, then no danger would be greater than facing up to yourself *with* this task' (Nietzsche, 1988: 293, italics in original). This lends a tantalizing, almost utopian promise to the process of self-becoming: quite what a future civilization that took these ideas seriously might look like is almost impossible for a decadent age to imagine.

In a fundamental way, and with unexpected religious undertones, Nietzsche and Hesse espouse an attitude of radical surrender to life itself, urging us to trust that its 'byways and detours' are essential to becoming what we are, even if it is only in hindsight that they will make any sense. This is the meaning behind Nietzsche's 'formula for human greatness': '*amor fati*' (1988: 297). It is an idea that both acknowledges and celebrates our inability to fully grasp or determine the meaning of our lives, which, in turn, fosters an open, vulnerable and courageous stance towards the world, making us receptive to the process of individuation and helping us guard against the contorting forces of cynicism and resentment.

Indeed, instead of containing or managing life, Nietzsche and Hesse propagate the attitude exemplified by their protagonists – characters who are themselves never complete and never at peace, but are courageous enough to remain receptive to life, in spite of their conspicuous mortality. As Haller says, in a complete reversal of his resigned cynicism at the novel's opening: 'I . . . was eager to begin the game again, to taste its torments again, to shudder in the face of its meaninglessness again, to traverse the hell of my inner life again, and by no means for the last time' (Hesse, 1975: 237). It is an attitude that staves off suicide and calls for heroism in an age otherwise gripped by nihilism – even as there is something undeniably timeless to their ideas. In the defiant words of Zarathustra: 'Was that life? Well then! Once more!' (Nietzsche, 2012: 119).

Notes

- 1 Translations of all the German sources are my own, except in the case of *Ecce Homo*, where I have leant heavily on the excellent translation by Large (2009).
- 2 As Peter André Bloch notes, Hesse decorated his room in Tübingen with two pictures of Nietzsche. When he left Tübingen for Basel in 1899, he arrived, in Hesse's words, 'with Nietzsche's works (to the extent that they had been published at that time) and a framed copy of Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* in my case . . . I had already published a small book of poems, had read Schopenhauer and was an ardent admirer of Nietzsche' (Quoted in Bloch, 2016: 66).
- 3 Eugene Stelzig describes this particular passage in *Klingsor* as 'a significant backhanded compliment to Nietzsche's autobiography' (2014: 172). In *The Nuremberg Trip*, shortly before the publication of *Steppenwolf*, Hesse makes direct reference to *Ecce Homo*, considering it as a potential, though ultimately flawed, model for German literature: 'Occasional, despairing books like Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* seem to show a way forward, but, in the end, they show even more clearly our hopelessness' (1987: 155).

- 4 As Hesse explained in his subsequent article, 'On "Zarathustra's Return"' (1919): 'was it not him, the lonely Nietzsche, the weary scorner of the German Kaiser-mania, the last fervent priest of an apparently dying German culture – was he not the one, the untimely, isolated one, whose voice spoke more strongly than any other to the German youth?' (2002: 93–4).
- 5 While, in this context, *Menschwerdung* might be translated as individuation (although the word *Individuation* also exists in German), it literally means 'becoming human'.
- 6 More than just a personal story, for the Editor of the *Steppenwolf* Haller's fate represents 'the sickness of the age itself' (Hesse, 1975: 27).
- 7 Here, *Nächsten* literally means those closest or most immediate; *Liebe* means love, hence 'brotherly love'. By replacing *Liebe* with *Sucht*, which means addiction, 'brotherly love' becomes 'brotherly fixation' or dependency.
- 8 The term 'individuation' was taken up by Jung via Arthur Schopenhauer, but has its roots in sixteenth-century alchemy (Samuels et al., 1986: 76). It is a central concept in Jung's analytical psychology and was first defined in his *Psychological Types* (1921) – a work that had been in the writing since 1913. In contrast to the homogenous nature of modern mass man, 'Individuation', Jung tells us, 'is a process of *differentiation*, having as its goal the development of the personality' (1976: 448).

Jung is a key interlocutor with Nietzsche and Hesse. As Bishop writes, there are 'deep parallels between the philosophy of Nietzsche and the psychology of Jung' – *Psychological Types*, for example, contains the chapter 'The Apollinian and the Dionysian'. For Bishop, Jung's entire 'intellectual development can be read in detail as a reception of Nietzsche's thinking' (1995: 20). The connections between Jung and Hesse are perhaps even more profound. From the spring of 1916 until November 1917, Hesse underwent therapy with Jung's student, Joseph Bernhard Lang (see Feitknecht, 2006). At the same time Hesse began reading Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* and, in 1916, made Jung's acquaintance. Günter Baumann describes *Demian*, written towards the end of this first round of therapy, as 'a model example of the Jungian individuation process' (1989: 80). As Jung wrote to Hesse in 1919, when the novel was finally published: 'I must thank you, sincerely, for your book, which is accomplished and truthful in equal measure . . . It struck me like the beam of a lighthouse on a stormy night' (quoted in Baumann, 1989: 12). After subsequent therapy with Jung in 1921 and again with Lang in 1925–6, Hesse wrote *Steppenwolf*, reading the Magic Theatre section of his manuscript at Jung's Psychology Club in Zurich.

Despite this clear line of influence, however, conceiving Hesse's work merely as an expression of Jungian psychology fails to do justice to the richness and diversity of Hesse's thought and reading, as investigated, for example, by Walter Jahnke (1984). Moreover, Hesse's relationship to psychology was by no means straightforward. Despite his life-long interest in Jung's thought, he had already expressed reservations by the time of *The Nuremberg Trip*: 'Psychoanalysis seemed to us to be an aid', he writes, 'but as yet no writer, neither a psychoanalyst nor an analytically trained author, has freed this kind of psychology from its armour of all too narrow, all too dogmatic, all too vain academe' (1987: 155). See also Baumann (1989: 24–5).

- 9 As well as 'attempt', the German noun *Versuch* means 'experiment' and, given its root *Suchen*, it also implies 'quest' or 'search' – a tripple meaning which are all relevant to these passages.
- 10 Heidegger considers what he terms 'thrownness' to be a central part of the human condition – a state from which we can never escape. In *Being and Time*, published in the same year as *Steppenwolf*, he writes: 'Thrownness is neither a "fact that is finished" nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein's facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw' (1962: 223). We remain in the throw and, Heidegger continues, are 'sucked into the turbulence of the "they's" inauthenticity' (1962: 223). In a similar way to Nietzsche and Hesse, Heidegger suggests that we deny or 'forget' the essential and the necessary, living instead in

a state of complacent inauthenticity. While the concepts are not precise parallels, there are similarities between Dasein's general inauthenticity and Nietzsche's 'miserable ease' or, even more so, 'decadence'. For Heidegger, man also exists in a general state of silent panic, or 'uninhibited hustle' (1962: 222), in which he busies and distracts himself with the fashionable and conventional in an attempt to smother deeper callings. While Heidegger denies any moral quality to *Being and Time*, its dichotomy between authenticity and inauthenticity has a similar feel to Zarathustra's more direct imperative: 'Become what you are!'

- 11 'In media vita' (in the midst of life) was considered by Nietzsche for the title of *Ecce Homo*. See Kofman and Large (1994: 63).
- 12 In the German novel, this quote, uttered by Sinclair in the depths of the story, also stands as an epigraph on the first page. In its entirety, it reads: 'All I wanted was to give life and expression to that which, of its own accord, wanted to get out of me. Why was that so hard?'

References

- Ball H (1947) *Hermann Hesse: Sein Leben und sein Werk*. Zurich: Fretz & Wasmuth.
- Baumann G (1989) *Hermann Hesses Erzählungen im Lichte der Psychologie C. G. Jungs*. Berlin: Schöubel Verlag.
- Berman R (1986) *The Rise of the Modern German Novel*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bloch PA (2016) Zarathustras Wiederkehr: Hermann Hesses Beziehung zu Friedrich Nietzsche. *Hermann-Hesse-Jahrbuch* 8: 59–88.
- Bishop P (1995) *The Dionysian Self: C. G. Jung's Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bishop P (2012) *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche*. New York: Camden House.
- Cornils I (2009) Introduction: From outsider to global player – Hermann Hesse in the twenty-first century. In: I Cornils (ed.) *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse*. New York: Camden House, pp. 1–16.
- Domino B (2012) Nietzsche's use of 'amor fati' in 'Ecce Homo'. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43(2): 283–303.
- Feitknecht T (2006) *Die dunkle und wilde Seite der Seele: Briefwechsel mit seinem Psychoanalytiker Joseph Bernard Lang 1916–1944*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Freud S (2001) A difficulty in the path of psycho-analysis. In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17. London: Vintage, pp. 135–44.
- Han-Pile B (2009) Nietzsche and amor fati. *European Journal of Philosophy* 19(2): 224–61.
- Heidegger M (1962) *Being and Time*, trans. J Macquarrie and E Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hesse H (1975 [1927]) *Der Steppenwolf*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Hesse H (1977) *Klingsors letzter Sommer*. In: *Die Romane und die grossen Erzählungen*, vol. 4. Stuttgart: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 95–154.
- Hesse H (1987) *Die Nürnberger Reise*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 115–79.
- Hesse H (2002) Zu 'Zarathustras Wiederkehr'. In: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 18. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 91–4.
- Hesse H (2014 [1917]) *Demian: Die Geschichte von Emil Sinclairs Jugend*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Hödl HG (2009) *Der letzte Jünger des Dionysos*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Horrocks D (1993) Harry Haller as 'höherer Mensch': Nietzschean themes and motifs in Hermann Hesse's 'Der Steppenwolf'. *German Life and Letters* 46(2): 134–44.

- Jahnke W (1984) *Hermann Hesse: Demian. Ein erlebter Roman*. Zurich: Schöningh.
- Jeffrey DL (1992) Jacob wrestling. In: DL Jeffery (ed.) *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., pp. 852–4.
- Jung CG (1976) *Psychological Types*, trans. HG Baynes. In: H Read, M Adler, G Fordham and W McGuire (eds) *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 6. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kenosian D (1995) *Puzzles of the Body: The Labyrinth in Kafka's 'Prozeß', Hesse's 'Steppenwolf', and Mann's 'Zauberberg'*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kofman S and Large D (1994) Explosion I: Of Nietzsche's 'Ecce Homo'. *Diacritics* 24(4): 50–70.
- Kuhn H (2014) Kommentar. In: H Hesse, *Demian. Die Geschichte von Emil Sinclairs Jugend*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 171–90.
- Large D (2009) Introduction. In: F Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. D Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. xi–xxviii.
- Nietzsche F (1954) Brief an Reinhart von Seydlitz. In: K Schlechta (ed.) *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in Drei Bänden*, vol. 3. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, p. 1276.
- Nietzsche F (1988 [1888]) *Ecce Homo*. In: G Colli and M Montinari (eds) *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, vol. 6. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, pp. 255–374.
- Nietzsche F (2012) *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Cologne: Anaconda Verlag.
- Samuels A, Shorter B and Plaut F (1986) *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sirucek J (2010) 'Demian' als stärkster Ausdruck des Einflusses von Friedrich Nietzsche auf das Werk Hermann Hesses. *Brünner Beiträge zur Germanistik und Nordistik* 15(1–2): 149–69.
- Solbach A (2009) The aesthetics of ritual: pollution, magic, and sentimentality in Hesse's 'Demian'. In: I Cornils (ed.) *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse*. New York: Camden House, pp. 81–115.
- Stelzig EL (2014) *Hermann Hesse's Fictions of the Self: Autobiography and the Confessional Imagination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Swales M (2009) Der Steppenwolf. In: I Cornils (ed.) *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse*. New York: Camden House, pp. 171–86.
- Szabó L (2007) *Der Einfluss Friedrich Nietzsches auf Hermann Hesse. Formen des Nihilismus und seiner Überwindung bei Nietzsche und Hesse*. Vienna: Praesens Verlag.
- Ziolkowski T (1965) *The Novels of Hermann Hesse: A Study in Theme and Structure*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Author biography

Thomas Crew is a PhD candidate at St Edmund's College, Cambridge. His research considers German dystopian literature from the genre's inception, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the 1950s. Recent publications include: 'Ernst Jüngers "Gläserne Bienen" und der Übergang zur Perfektion', *Berliner Debatte Initial* (2020) and "'Der Tag hängt tot zwischen Himmel und Erde": On the theme of ambivalence in Ernst Barlach's *Der tote Tag*', *German Life and Letters* (2019).